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1848



S E R M O N

ON THE

OCCASION OF THE DEATH OF

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS.

BY REV. STEDMAN W. HANKS.

LOWELL:

PUBLISHED BY W. H. WALDRON.

1848.



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Hanks, Stedman W. (Stedman Wright)⁵⁰⁰

A

S E R M O N

ON THE

OCCASION OF THE DEATH

OF THE

HON. JOHN QUINCY ADAMS,

PREACHED AT THE

JOHN STREET CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,

IN LOWELL, MARCH 5, 1848.

BY REV. STEDMAN W. HANKS.

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LOWELL, MARCH, 19, 1848.

REV. S. W. HANKS,

Dear Sir:—

In common with other members of the John Street Society, we the undersigned, being desirous of perusing the Sermon preached by you, on the occasion of the death of the Hon. J. Q. Adams, would respectfully request a copy for publication.

HOMER BARTLETT,
JEFFERSON BANCROFT,
ROYAL SOUTHWICK,
NATHAN ALLEN,
SELWIN BANCROFT,
DANIEL HOLT,
THOMAS WENTWORTH,
SAMUEL KIDDER, jr.,
A. L. BROOKS,
GEORGE MANSFIELD,

C. L. KNAPP,
OTIS L. ALLEN,
S. McLANATHAN,
J. J. JUDKINS,
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ASA WETHERBEE,
JOHN TRIPP,
JESSE STILES,
JAMES M. PEABODY.

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S E R M O N .

AND HEZEKIAH SLEPT WITH HIS FATHERS, AND THEY BURIED HIM IN THE CHIEFEST OF THE SEPULCHRES OF THE SONS OF DANIEL: AND ALL JUDAH, AND THE INHABITANTS OF JERUSALEM DID HIM HONOR AT HIS DEATH.—2 *Chronicles*, xxxii: 3.

THE death of a great and good ruler is an eventful occurrence. It often forms an era in the history of nations. Though there is a limited sense in which men are equal, it is by no means true that they are equal in their capacities for transacting the business of government. God has given but few truly great and good rulers to the world, and when they die a loss is sustained which cannot easily be repaired. It is not strange, then, that we find so many records of mourning and lamentation at the death of those who have occupied high stations in society, and whose influence has been on the side of virtue, and whose example and precepts have not been inconsistent with each other. When Samuel the prophet and judge in Israel died, his death was deplored as a national loss. "All the Israelites were gathered together, and lamented him, and buried him in his house at Ramah."

When Abner died king David "lifted up his voice and wept, and all the people wept at the grave of Abner. And the king said unto his servants, know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day, in Israel." When Josiah died they "buried him in the sepulchre of his fathers, and all Judah and Jerusalem *mourned*."

That national mourning on account of the loss of great and good rulers is appropriate, will appear, if we consider,

First, their *extreme scarcity*. Many men have been clothed with authority, in different ages and countries, and having made their impress upon the world, have passed away. Pharaohs, Jeroboams, Alexanders and Bonapartes, have been more numerous than Josephs, Nehemiahs, Cromwells, and Washingtons. If we look upon the great men of the present day, and especially upon those who occupy the high places of the nations, we are not able to find many who through evil and good report will stand fast for the right.

In the midst of surrounding corruption it is extremely hard for a good man to rise by the suffrages of the people, to a high place of influence. The world loves its own, and he that represents its wickedness is not likely on that account to lose its smiles or its patronage. As the world is, great and good men will not be numerous among its rulers, and

the loss of such men will continue to be great in proportion to their fewness.

The removal of great and good men from high stations of influence is often a great *calamity* to a nation. The death of Joshua and the elders that outlived him, was followed by a series of calamities, from which the nation did not recover for many years. The people fell into licentiousness, anarchy, and confusion. A barrier against wicked influences was taken away, and the floods of ungodliness swept over the people until David was raised up to turn back the current. Solomon's death was the occasion of the disruption of the kingdom of Israel, and of a most horrible civil war. The death of Pitt formed an era in the history of England. Great and good men among the councils and in the cabinets of nations, are the pillars that uphold and give stability to the social compact. When the Sampson of wickedness would pull down a good government, and overwhelm a people in anarchy and confusion, his wisest policy is to take hold of the *pillars* and remove them, and when God would send judgments upon a people he sometimes "withers their strong rods," and "gives them children to be their princes, and babes to rule over them."

Wisdom is always better than weapons of war, and the real strength of a nation lies in the heads and hearts of those who direct its affairs. Neither

riches, nor refinement, nor extensive territory, makes a nation strong. The strength of a nation is in the wisdom of its great men, and the virtue of its people. If it has not *these*, it is weak, whatever else it may possess.

The Grecians owe their power mainly to the great men which that nation produced. They were not rich, and their country was but an insignificant peninsula, which we might sink in some of our large lakes ; but their great men have conferred upon them lasting honors ; and though their country has fallen out from the catalogue of nations, the names of their mighty men are remembered, and their writings are studied, throughout the civilized world.

Great and good men, by their *example* as well as by their wisdom, confer blessings upon a nation. A wicked man in a high station gives respectability to the particular vices to which he is addicted. A drunken statesman is a perpetual advocate of intemperance. A profane ruler imparts a kind of respectability to profanity, and by his example leads others to the same demoralizing course. Every form of vice is dignified in a measure by having men in high places to practise it. On the other hand vice is discouraged and virtue strengthened, by the example of those whose conduct is virtuous. If horse-racing, gambling, sabbath-breaking, duelling, and slave-trading, are carried on by men who are the chosen rulers

of the country, the people will go and do likewise. A vicious man in the capitol poisons the fountains of influence as no other man can do. He has the power of weakening more or less the nation's moral energies. His position is such that he can lay his hands upon the very vitals of the country. Neither talents nor eloquence can counteract the influence of vicious example. Example is more powerful than precept, in high stations as well as in low. Example has a still small voice, which goes to the heart and leaves its impression there ; and no man's good example can lose its influence, as no man's bad example can fail to make its appropriate impression.

If what we have said be true, our nation has occasion to mourn the death of the great and good man who has just been laid in his grave, having died after fifty years honorable service in his country. To have given birth to such a man as John Quincy Adams is an honor to our nation. He was intellectually and morally great. His fame is not tarnished by the immoralities of his life. He has made no war upon the moral forces of his country, and none of his blood runs in the veins of his degraded and oppressed fellow beings who wear the chains of bondage. He has not, like some others, written and spoken about "popular rights," while practising popular wrongs. Though the thunders of his eloquence have often been heard, none of his bolts have

been aimed at the sentinels who have been set to guard the morals of the nation. The sabbath, the sanctuary, and the bible, have been respected by him; and amid the numerous cares that came upon him, he did not forget that future state of being into which he has now passed.

Without attempting an analysis of his character, or touching upon the opinions which he maintained as the member of a political party, let us direct our attention to several considerations which entitle Mr. Adams to a place upon the roll of this world's great and good rulers.

Though birth, blood, and favorable circumstances in early life, do not of themselves make men great or good, they are sometimes important helps. Mr. Adams was of honorable descent. He belonged to the true nobility. No king or noble lord could boast of more honorable parentage. His father *developed* nobility and royalty out of *himself*, by his noble deeds in assisting to lay the foundations of this great republic. He "*knighted*" *himself* when he signed the declaration of independence, and when the crusaders against tyranny took the field he was among "the bravest of the brave." "Mounted upon the great idea" of human rights, he spurred forward into the midst of dangers, and called on others to follow. Nor did he retreat until tyranny was confronted and driven back, and liberty proclaimed through the land.

Mr. Adams' mother was also a remarkable woman. She was "a help-meet" for the man who moved so conspicuously in the stormy scenes of the revolution. Her writings bear the impress of a mind of high order. The blooming titles of many queens and princes are eclipsed by the noble Christian words and deeds of the mother of the great statesman who has just bid adieu to earth. The son was born and nurtured amid the exciting scenes which preceded and accompanied the struggle of our nation for liberty. He was but a lad when our national independence was declared. His cradle was rocked by the hands which helped to rock the cradle of our liberty. By the roar of cannon and the flowing of blood, he was taught how highly liberty was valued by those who took the field for the defence of their rights. The best facilities were afforded him for acquiring an education, and the circumstances in which he was placed in early life, were all greatly in his favor. He was baptised in infancy, and by a mother's lips was taught the value of the bible, and of those influences which come from the institutions of religion. Hear the language of that Christian mother, as in her letters she speaks to her son then about ten years of age.

"Great learning and superior abilities will be of little avail, unless virtue, honor, truth and integrity are added to them. Remember that you are accountable to your Maker for all your words and your actions. Dear as you are to me, I had rather you would have perished in that ocean you

have crossed, or that untimely death had cropped your infant years, than to see you an immoral profligate, or graceless child. Your grandfather, a plain clergyman, left you a legacy more valuable than gold or silver — his blessing and prayer that you might become a useful citizen, a guardian of the laws, of the liberty, and religion of your country. May this be treasured up in your memory. Practice upon it, and believe me you will find it a treasure that moth and rust cannot corrupt."

But, though Mr. Adams' parentage, and the circumstances of his early education, were favorable to the development of an interesting character, they were not the foundation upon which his character was built. *God gave him a mind of great natural capacity.* He possessed strength and largeness of understanding. He could "see at a distance." By a kind of intuition, he could look through what was dark to others. He had what may be termed a *genius* for government,—a peculiar turn of mind, fitting him to see results in their causes. He could "smell the battle afar off," and see an approaching foe before "the sound of the trumpets, or the thunder of the captains and the shouting" was heard.

By diligence, and the most rigid habits of study, his natural capacities were cultivated to such an extent that his mind seemed to grasp and illuminate every subject to which his attention was directed. No man could unravel false and subtle arguments with more power. By long and diligent study of the science of human government, and by careful observation of human nature as developed in the actions of men, he attained a wisdom which enabled him to

look far into the future, and to avert evils by averting their causes. The history of the nations of the earth, both ancient and modern, was familiar to him, and this knowledge shed a light in his path, and enabled him to act intelligibly in matters which were perplexing to others. Had his councils been heard, we should have been saved from many blots which now stain our character as a nation.

Magnanimity and largeness of heart were striking characteristics of the man of whom we speak. He did not find his way to office by any of those petty tricks by which small men are raised to great places. He was no political quack, around whose quick moving carriage clouds of dust arose, as declarations that great business was on hand, and whose merits had to be proclaimed by his own lips. In his course through life there was no pushing, or thrusting, or elbowing others aside. The little arts which raise little men, were never resorted to. He took the lowest seat, until he distinctly heard the call,—“friend, go up higher,”—and when he ascended it was with the modesty which none but a great man is apt to show. His magnanimity gave him at all times a commanding influence. He could not be bribed, and the fear of man was not in him. He would not fight a duel because he deemed it wrong, but a hundred duellists could not stop him from speaking, in his place, what his sense of duty impelled

him to. Bowie-knives, and violent gestures, and alarming threats, excited no other feeling than that of contempt, for men so weak as to resort to *such* carnal weapons, when great questions were under discussion.

He was a man of true *decision of character*. It has been objected to Mr. Adams, that he worked *with* and *against* all parties,—that at one time he was *against* the whole of Texas, and at another time *for* the whole of Mexico. Mr. Adams' decision of character was that of a wise man, pursuing the object which he had in view by wise means. He did not sail his ship in one direction, irrespective of winds and regardless of icebergs. He *tacked* when by doing so he could on the whole make the most *progress*. His spy-glass was one which common men could not use. They needed *his eyes* in order to see what he saw. Where they saw only fog and clouds, he could see breakers and mountains. Where they could see nothing, he could see pirates putting themselves in readiness to board and plunder whatever promised spoil. Human liberty was the great end which Mr. Adams had in view. Toward *this* he moved *not unmindful of obstacles*. He changed his course of action without changing his principles. He was stationary while he *seemed* to be moving. Like the sun he seemed to *rise* and *go down*, when his change was only *apparent*, and not real. Things

around him were in a rotary condition, and short-sighted men who were *themselves* continually "carried about," looked upon him as the revolving object, while they were really so. When Mr. Adams opposed the annexation of Texas, he did it with the hope that slavery would be prevented from spreading over that fair land. But when Texas was *annexed*, a new phase of things presented itself. A war with Mexico was the result, and the conquest of the whole country seemed highly probable. What now shall be done? Mexico but a few years ago had abolished slavery, and the spirit of freedom was among the people. Let us have the whole of Mexico, says Mr. Adams. If the country wants territory, let us not cut off a little piece of Mexico, which slavery can manage, and give *that* up to the South: Let us have the *whole of Mexico*, including that part where the spirit of liberty exists, and then let both countries united in one, combine their influence against slavery. If the Boa-Constrictor will swallow *something*, let it swallow an object that will be hard to digest, and which will put it into a state of stupefaction, and in the mean time let the friends of liberty convert it into an animal, bristling with arrows and barbed irons.

When the end of the beginning which our country has made in the affair of Mexico, shall be disclosed, it *may* appear that Mr. Adams' course was altogether

consistent, and what men have called hypocrisy, *history* may set down as a splendid illustration of *true decision of character*. Mr. Adams knew that the South, in its movements, had an eye to the "*king row*," and like a wise man, *he* moved accordingly.

Firmness in the defence of principles which he considered right, was another characteristic of the great man of whom we speak. The vote of the Legislature of his own State, did not lead him to any change of opinions or any swerving from the course which he thought was right. He could give up his seat in Congress, but he could not abandon any of his principles. In the history of his life we have many illustrations of his firmness, but perhaps none is more conspicuous than that which occurred in his old age, when he attempted the defence of the right of petition, in the House of Representatives, at Washington. The subject of slavery was agitating the whole country, and its abolishment in the District of Columbia, was respectfully petitioned for by numerous citizens of the Northern States. The presentation of these petitions stirred up the fury of the South. Howlings came up from what was denominated our "national bear garden," such as had not been heard for years. A furious political tempest came on. In the midst of the storm, Mr. Adams stood almost alone, while "hail stones and coals of fire" were poured down upon the right of petition, and with it upon

him as the defender of this right. At the roar of the storm, small politicians slunk away into their holes, and remained, until the thunders begun to die away. Amid scorn and taunts from the North and the South, he stood fast for his position. Though violence was threatened, and fears were entertained that blood would be shed upon the floor of the capitol, he faltered not. For more than three days, amidst the most tempestuous debate that ever occurred in our national capitol, he maintained his ground against the most fearful odds.

In this famous contest, Mr. Adams' magazine of intellectual powder and ball was found to hold out to the last, and his good sword was seen hewing down his assailants, upon the right and the left. He sounded no parley after the battle was fairly commenced. By the roaring of his thunder and the order of his movements, as well as by the shock of his onsets, it was at length understood that an enemy was in the field, not easily to be overcome. The right to petition Congress on the subject of Slavery, was secured. A victory was achieved more glorious than that of Buena Vista or Vera Cruz. When the battles of Generals Taylor and Scott are forgotten, and the halo of glory which now gathers around the warriors who have led their armed hosts to the field of blood, shall have passed away, the battle of February, 1842, in the House of Represen-

tatives, when John Quincy Adams “crossed swords” with the most distinguished men of the country, and in his old age vanquished his assailants, will be remembered, and “the old man eloquent” will be revered and honored as an unflinching friend of the right; one who amidst obloquy and scorn could maintain his place, while all around him — the irresolute and the faint-hearted — were cowering, and counting “prudence the better part of valor.”

Another characteristic of Mr. Adams was *honesty*. He played no games for the sake of securing office. At various times in his history, a political *manœuvre* would for the time being, have secured to him both honor and emolument. He would have nothing that did not come to him by fair means. The highest offices in the gift of the people weighed in the balance with honesty, were lighter than vanity.

Mr. Adams was a true *philanthropist*. He looked upon man everywhere as his brother. He stood ready to lend his influence to every enterprise which had in view the elevation and happiness of mankind. In his conduct toward the Amistad captives, we have an illustration of his *philanthropy*. With no prospect of reward, he came forward to the aid of those unhappy sons of Africa, who were thrown upon our shores, and here exposed to dangers more frightful than the perils of the ocean when stormy winds are

abroad. He defended them against combined influences which would have overborne almost any other man. To this he was prompted by his love of man, and not his love of money. The rights of his fellow beings were likely to be invaded, and that fact was reason enough why he should come forward for their defence.

For those in the prison-house of bondage, he did what he could, and though he differed materially from many in his views of what was the best way for benefitting permanently his fellow beings in bonds, he was ready to do what could *constitutionally* and prudently be done for the emancipation of the bond-man. He lived when our federal compact was formed, He well understood the difficulty of uniting independent States in the common defence of the country. The roar of British cannon, and the blood of the revolutionary battle fields, he had not forgotten. By the federal compact the country was bound together for the defence of rights never before enjoyed by man. Upon the declaration of independence stood the name of his venerable father, who with the well known words "sink or swim, survive or perish, I put my heart and hand to this instrument," wrote unfalteringly his name upon that document which has caused thrones to rock and tyranny to tremble, while humanity has been taking breath and gaining courage for yet mightier struggles against oppression. It is

not strange that he revered the federal compact, and that his hand was never raised to violate what he considered its stipulations.

When the right of petition was denied, and slavery was attempting to stop the mouth of beseeching humanity with *gag laws*, the man who revered the constitution showed no respect for powers allied to do what that constitution did not authorize. Because it guaranteed to the slave States certain rights, it did not follow that the free States were precluded from the right of speaking and remonstrating. Through the wall which slavery constructed out of unfair inferences from the constitution, Mr. Adams, for the love of humanity, made a breach, yea levelled it as effectually as the walls of Jericho were levelled, so that now the right of petition is no longer called in question.

On every subject pertaining to the rights of man, and to his elevation in the scale of being, Mr. Adams was ready to exert a favorable influence. He did not belong to that class of the friends of the people and of popular rights, who under democratic colors exercise kingly prerogatives; or to that class who resist all progress, under the pretence that all improvement fosters pride, and tends to aristocracy. He did not level *downward*, but *upward*. Whatever tended to the good of the race, found in him a friend and advocate. He wanted no easy chair in which to

repose, while he looked discouragement and death upon every project which had in view the comfort and improvement of others. With a liberal hand and a great heart, he helped forward whatever carried man toward the end for which God created him; and he was not careful to enquire whether he rode in a coach and six, or walked with his pilgrim staff, or advanced in some other way, *provided always it was the right way, and one the choice of which did not interfere with the progress of others.* He did not belong to that class who feel called upon to oppose whatever they cannot aid, nor to that who must be *leaders*, or nothing. He could without impatience see others do what he was not disposed to do himself, and did not impugn the motives of others, in order to justify his own.

During Mr. Adams' long life, he was one of the most *laborious* of men. Rising at five o'clock in the morning, he lighted his own fire, and commenced his labors while all around him was silence, and deep sleep was administering to many such relief as nature tired and exhausted in the midnight debauch, was demanding. He was never known to be idle. He was struck down while at his work, and well has it been asked,—“Where else could death have found him but at the post of duty?”

He was a *proverbially punctual* man. He was always in his place in time, unless prevented by sick-

ness. His seat in Congress, and in the Sanctuary, was never empty, when it ought to be filled. He found his way to the house of God in sunshine and in storm. During the great snow storm of 1846, he was one of thirteen found at the Sanctuary, and during his whole life has example spoken to all half day and fair day worshippers, as well as to all neglecters of the house of God.

This leads me, finally, to speak of his *religious character*. His religious *opinions* are perhaps not yet fully understood. Several years ago, under the apprehension that infidelity was increasing in New England, he prepared a lecture on faith, which he delivered in many places. In that lecture he maintained that to be a Christian a man must believe in God, in the bible, in the divinity of the Saviour's mission, and in a future state of rewards and punishments. In a late published sermon, it is said that "he had not the mind of a great man," and "that he has never been proved to be generous," and it is added that "he is said to have been close, and sometimes it has been hinted that he was *mean*." The same writer, in another published sermon says, that Jesus Christ "was mistaken on some points," and that "if Christianity rests on his authority, and that alone, it falls when the foundation falls, *and that stands at the mercy of a school boy*. He also calls Jesus Christ "a mortal man," and "a *feeble brother*." He says, also, that

“Christ bears *his own sins*, not another’s,” and that “he needed to work out his own salvation, as we must do.” It is not strange that a man who could write such things, could write other strange things. It is easy to cast slurs upon a man’s character, by calling his frugality meanness, and stirring up old party prejudices against him. It requires but little courage to go into the tomb of a dead man, and call him hard names.

I am not ambitious to settle the question of Mr. Adams’ religious opinions. That he did not esteem Christ a “*feeble brother*,” who “needed to work out *his own salvation, as we must do*,” I am quite sure. To a clergyman, a few years ago, he used the following language:—“I hold in great distrust all my early opinions on religion. As I advance in life, I feel more and more distrust of all self-formed opinions. I throw myself back upon the simple Word of God. I receive what that teaches. I go where that leads. I should not, I suppose, be considered fully orthodox, according to the standard of the Presbyterian Church; but I am not so far from them as people generally imagine. I enjoy the worship of that church; I am edified by its ministry.”

But we need not search for his religious *opinions*. His *practises* are before the world. He loved the bible, and read it every day. He studied it in many

